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AUTHOR Thomas, M. Donald; Wynne, George E.
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ABSTRACT

In late 1982 Mississippi passed a massive school improvement program shaped around the effective schools concept as defined by Ron Edmonds. The characteristics of effective schools identified by Edmonds and made the cornerstone of the Mississippi legislation were that (1) the principal is a strong instructional leader; (2) the school has an articulated, identified academic focus; (3) high expectations are maintained of teachers and students; (4) student progress is measured regularly and systematically; and (5) a safe and orderly climate conducive to teaching and learning is maintained. Among the provisions of the law are that the state superintendent be appointed by a state board of education rather than elected, and that a School Executive Management Institute be created to train local school principals and local district superintendents in the principles of effective schooling and the leadership techniques necessary to implement them. The training programs have proved to be both effective and popular, largely due to the leadership of the appointed state superintendent, Richard Boyd. (PGD)

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MISSISSIPPI: THE FIRST TOTAL EFFECTIVE SCHOOL STATE

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By

M. Donald Thomas
and
George E. Wynne[1]

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"A national test, administered to every student in every school in the country, is necessary if the school reform movement is to survive." These were the words of Dr. Ted Bell, Secretary of Education during the first Reagan administration. He keynoted what Mississippi education leaders are calling an "education revival" in that deep southern state.

In a leadership meeting of 160 school superintendents, Bell commended the state and Dr. Richard Boyd, the new State Superintendent, for launching the boldest, most progressive, best organized, and most promising program of reform that he has seen in the nation.

In late 1982 Mississippi passed a massive school improvement program. The legislation was shaped around the effective schools movement as it is defined by the research of the late Dr. Ron Edmonds of Michigan State University. The Edmonds research has been expanded and refined by a host of other education scholars and practitioners. Among them are Dr. Larry Lezotte, Michigan State University; Dr. Wilbur Brookover, Michigan State University; Dr. Dale Mann, Columbia University; Dr. Don Thomas, Deputy Superintendent of Education for the State of South Carolina; Dr. Ben Turner, Kent State Universtiy; Dr. Shirley Hord, University of Texas; Mr. Dennis Gray, Counsel for Basic Education; Dr. John Ervin, Danforth Foundation; Dr. Joan Shoemaker, State Department of Education of Connecticut; Dr. Robert Fortenberry, Jackson (Mississippi) Public Schools; and Dr. Rufus Young, St. Louis Public Schools.

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[1]Thomas is Deputy Superintendent, Division of Public Accountability, State Department of Education, Columbia, South Carolina 29201; Wynne is President, Kelwynn Corporation, 1636 Lelia Drive, Jackson, Mississippi 39216.

While some of the researchers hold slightly different positions, there is near unanimous agreement that the effective school is defined as a school in which all children learn regardless of race, socioeconomic status, sex, or other extenuating circumstances. They also generally agree that the research to identify effective schools was correlative and not casual. That is to say that when the five correlates of an effective school exist, learning by all the children is taking place. This does not necessarily say that the correlates cause a school to be effective. That point is being pursued by others. The correlates, however, seem to be found operating in effective schools.

The correlates which form the cornerstone of the Mississippi education reform movement were discovered by Edmonds in an exhaustive search for common characteristics of schools in which all children were showing relative progress in mastering a common body of knowledge. The correlates are:

- The principal is a strong instructional leader
- The school has a strong academic focus -- an identified and articulated body of knowledge that is to be learned
- There is a high degree of expectation of all teachers and students
- There is regular and systematic measurement of student progress to insure the mastery is being achieved
- There is a safe and orderly climate conducive to teaching and learning

Mississippi is the first state to totally embrace the effective school philosophy and organize a pervasive and all encompassing effort to implement it in every public school in the state. The state's effort results from the forceful leadership of former Governor William Winter, demands by the public for improved schools, and an edict from the state legislature to give authority and funding for the reform.

State law mandates performance based accreditation, dropout prevention, high school graduating testing requirements, in-service staff development, kindergarten, math and science scholarships, merit pay, professional development, provisional certification, teacher assistants, consolidation of school districts, state-wide testing and a mandatory School Executive Management Institute which will be attended by all school superintendents, principals, assistant principals, and other building level leaders.

The Mississippi law also abandoned the age-old practice of electing a State Superintendent and creating a state board of laymen to run the state's schools. That board, in an unprecedented move, selected an out-of-state education leader as their first appointed superintendent. He is Dr. Richard Boyd of Ohio. Jack Reed, the Chairman of the State Board, believes that an outsider is better able to deal with the many complex and hard decisions required to implement the reform legislation than a native would have been.

Boyd immediately set priorities for implementing the many aspects of the Effective schools Reform Act in Mississippi. He set reorganization of the State Department and the initiation of the School Executive Management Institute as his top priorities. He felt that he must establish strong direction and momentum immediately or the effort would be lost before it had a chance to succeed. The State Superintendent concurs in Bell's view that you must look your problems squarely in the eye and resolve to solve them. He is not afraid to publish test scores and he has the courage to milk the sacred cows of education. His down-to-business approach to reform is rapidly gaining the support of his associates in the state.

Citing leadership as the most critical element of the reform process, the new Superintendent appointed himself as the director of the newly formed School Executive Management Institute. He, the Institute Advisory Board,

and the State Board, after a diligent search, selected a private education and training company to assist in establishing the Institute. A curriculum of leadership fundamentals, familiarization with effective schools, teacher evaluation, staff development, and instructional focus, was put together in a comprehensive video-based format and teams of trainers were sent to 16 junior college sites to teach the new brand of effective school leadership to every building-level school leader in the state.

Boyd said, "Initiating the Management Institute was like organizing a small educational institution, and we accomplished it within a very short time because we were not afraid to draw from the private sector those services that give us the resources to accomplish what we are trying to do." Two mini-vans were equipped with television projector equipment, customized participants' materials, charts, and every other item necessary to teach the leadership course.

The two mobile teams will travel 20,000 miles and they will teach 2,500 school leaders the essence of effective schools by July, 1985. This will have been done within six months and each principal participant will have been taught and tested for their knowledge of the effective schools philosophy and practice. Principal participants are tested daily and those who do not successfully pass the post test are remediated the following day.

With mild resistance to the mandated Institute process and with much apprehension regarding the testing, principals came. One-fourth of the way through the Institute training cycle, the principals now rate the overall value and conduct of the professional training in the institute as 96 percent excellent or good. Their process evaluations contain comments that prove that professionals like to have good positive professional training. Once the participants overcame the initial apprehension and realized that the new State

Department of Education meant business and was in fact giving them the best possible effective school training, they began to develop a new sense of pride and direction.

On January 29 and 30, Mississippi's 160 superintendents were called together for their mandated leadership training. Again there was considerable apprehension because previous leadership initiatives by the State Department had not been helpful and in some cases had been counterproductive. The reservations quickly disappeared when a program of the nation's leading effective school researchers and practitioners gathered in Jackson to deliver the effective schools party line in a dynamic fashion. Dr. Benjamin Turner of Kent State University discussed equity in the effective schools. Dr. Wilbur Brookover, one of the founders of the movement, assured the superintendents that the implementation of the five correlates would in fact result in new rising trends on standardized test scores. Dr. Dale Mann of Columbia University told the group of the challenges posed to public education by the "school in the sky" and he insisted they would be the losers if they do not capitalize on technology to establish effective schools.

Dr. Charles Mitchell of Newark Public Schools told the Mississippi school chiefs that implementing effective school practices can take you from the worst to the best just as he proved in a burned out building in the center of his city. Dr. Savannah Young of the St. Louis Public Schools told the group that the effective schools classroom teacher wants an instructional leader who will give direction, stand by the teacher when the heat comes up, and measure results. She said, "As a teacher, I want my results posted on the wall for all to see, and I want to be rewarded for the progress my children make." Dr. Don Thomas, of the South Carolina State Department of Education, emphasized that the state level leadership must stay the course of effective

schools. He said that there has been great frustration and a general decline in school morale and effectiveness because high level leaders send out mixed signals or no signals at all. Other leaders spoke directly and pointedly to the several problems and opportunities of implementing a pervasive state-wide program of effective schools.

The superintendents who came with questions and apprehension rated the effective schools "revival" at 70 percent excellent and 30 percent good. All seemed to agree that there is now a new direction and purpose in the leadership of the State Department.

In Dr. Bell's parting remarks, he said in a television interview, "Education leaders in Mississippi are showing a measure of courage that is uncommon in education." He further stated, "Instead of taking the usual play-it-safe, pilot-project strategy, this state has decided what it is going to do and it is doing it in a dramatic and forceful way -- in a way that is exposed for all the education world to see." In conclusion he said, "In Mississippi education, all places to hide are being removed and teachers and leaders are being given resources and progress is going to be measured and compared so that the effective can be determined and rewarded."

Dr. Boyd is leading Mississippi in new and specific directions in public education. And while education reform is usually a long-range process, he is counting on measurable results within two years or less. And those results will be posted on the wall for all to view and compare. It is Mississippi's effort to keep the school reform going and to provide quality education for its citizens.